

THE LENTEN SUMMONS

PREACHER SOUNDS UNIVERSAL CALL TO ALL CLASSES.

TO ANNUAL SPIRITUAL DUTIES

"Sanctify Ye a Fast; Call a Solemn Assembly," Applies to the Rich and the Poor Alike, the Social Devotee, the Business Man, the Humble Worker and the Homekeeper—The Spring Fast.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1904, by William Baily, of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., Feb. 21.—In this sermon the preacher sounds the Lenten call to all classes—the social devotee, the business man, the humble worker and the homekeeper, the rich and the poor alike—as a summons to the annual duties of the season of spiritual preparation. The text is Joel 1, 14, "Sanctify ye a fast; call a solemn assembly."

The Presbyterian Church has enrolled among its leaders many intellectual theologians. Entitled to a prominent place among them by his learning, philosophic acumen and sanctified common sense is Dr. Francis L. Patton, formerly president of Princeton University and now President of Princeton Theological Seminary. Many of his weighty utterances have impressed me, but none more than one he made on the value and usefulness of the Episcopalian Church.

His words in substance were: "I believe the Episcopalian Church is one of the most effective churches in existence to-day. I believe in its ritual; I believe in its teachings. If I were not a Presbyterian, I would certainly be an Episcopalian. But, though I love and honor the Episcopalian Church, I also believe that the most absurd of monstrosities is a Presbyterian in his form of worship trying to ape an Episcopalian. While we are Presbyterians let us remain Presbyterians. When we want to become Episcopals in our form of worship, in responsive readings and in all that the Episcopalian service implies, let us become Episcopals. But do not let us try to change the Presbyterian pulpit into a chancel or the grand old simple service of the Presbyterian Church into a concert by a surplised choir and into the liturgy of the Episcopalian Church."

Amen, say I, to the sound advice of Dr. Patton. The simple dogmatics of the two or three congregational hymns, the chapter read from the Bible, the earnest prayers and the doctrinal as well as practical sermon can never be excelled as a service for the grand old church which the names of John Calvin and John Knox and Thomas Chalmers and Thomas Guthrie and Lowell Mason and William Taylor and John Hall have made immortal. But, though I would not have the Presbyterian Church adopt a ritual, I still insist that the Episcopalian Church has not an exclusive title to all the good things she may hold dear. Especially do I affirm that she has not a sole right to her spring fast, which starts with Ash Wednesday and closes with Easter's dawn. "Way back in Joel we read the command, 'Sanctify ye a fast; call a solemn assembly.' If that divine command is still in force for us as for God's ancient people, is there a better time for its observance than the period preceding our commemoration of the passion and resurrection of our Lord? It was at this season of the year, too, that the Master withdrew to the desert before the beginning of his ministry and there, fasting for forty days, prepared for the ordeal of his temptation. It will be well for Presbyterians as for Episcopals to meditate on that experience of our Lord and draw near to him in our hearts. We must have self abnegation for sin before we can truly have closer union with God. Therefore the purpose of this sermon is to show why the Episcopalian Lent should become a Presbyterian Lent, also why the 'spring fast,' which is the time of the

"lengthening of days," should be observed all the world over by all Christians, no matter to what individual churches they may belong.

The Episcopalian Lent, in the first place, calls a halt to the social dissipations now being practiced in all the large cities. It cries, "Peace, be still!" to the social whirlpool, which is gradually sucking down its many struggling victims. Peter was once being drawn into the depths of the Galilean lake. It says to the women of the "social abyss," "You have something higher to live for than a nightly round of receptions and parties and a never ending succession of afternoon teas." It says to the young men of the "social abyss," who, under the power of stimulants, are trying to work in the store day by day and to dance almost every night until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, "Young man, you had better stop and consider to what purpose you are devoting the best energies of your life." It warns the social devotee of the spiritual danger of his course, as a noted New York capitalist warned him of the financial danger, when some time ago he said: "The young men who will not succeed in business are those who night after night may be found in the ball-rooms and the dance halls and at the city clubhouses drinking a little, playing cards a little and eating expensive dinners. They are sometimes called the drones of society. This is a misnomer. Like some small insects that sport for a day in the summer sunshine, they are minute destructives. Their lives in the economy of social life make one of the petty agonies of degeneration."

Was not the capitalist right? Are not the ball-room and the dance hall and the clubhouse a continual menace to success in business? Can a young man go to a progressive euchre party and play cards until 11 o'clock and sit down to a mid-night banquet and then be in the right physical and mental trim to sell goods in the store the next morning? Is not the social shrine also a very poor foundation upon which to build the altar of Jesus Christ? Is not most of its influence spiritually debilitating? Some time ago I read a wonderful book entitled "The Call of the Wild." The central figure of that story was a magnificent dog, a cross between a St. Bernard and a Great Dane. He was stolen from his California home and sent far north into the Klondike regions, where he was compelled to drag the miners' sleds over the Alaskan snows. Jack London, the writer, with a master hand traces him from a great, big, loving house dog down and down until he is a dog thief among dog thieves. He traces his degeneracy down and down until at last the bayings of the wolves call him into the darkness of the northern forests, and "the call of the wild" is answered by "the response of the wild."

Is not society's call too often "the call of the wild"? In the social world when you give a banquet, do you not for the most part ask only those in your own social set? Do you obey the divine command, "When thou makest a dinner or a supper call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbors lest they also bid thee again and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Is not society's call often "the call of the wild" because it is a call to selfishness, the call of only doing good to them who do good to you? Is it not often the call merely of wealth to associate with wealth and social caste with social caste? Oh, ye worshippers at the social shrines, better heed to-day the Lenten call! Better snuff out the many lights of the ball-rooms and the banquet halls! Know ye not that during the "spring fast" the lowly Nazarene is knocking at the door of your hearts trying to get in?

The Episcopalian Lent, in the next place, is a protest against business absorption. It says to the merchant, the manufacturer and the professional man: "You have a right to work. Indeed, you must work and work hard if you are to support your family and meet the financial necessities which are yours. But, oh, man, you have no right to make the acquisition of money the chief object of your life any more than you have

a right to live to eat. By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. But that, sweat should not make thee indifferent to God or to the higher purposes of life, for which thou wert created."

But the great danger of money making is that the acquisition of wealth may become a passion. The calls of the money market become so great and urgent that an average business man does not feel that he has time to stop and think about his relations to God. But though the business world would demand all of a man's energies, the Lenten season comes into a busy merchant's life and says, "Oh, man, you should never be too busy to take time to think of your responsibilities to God!"

The Episcopalian Lent, in the next place, is a time for spiritual housecleaning. As the "spring fast" immediately succeeds the time when twibusiness men takes an account of stock, we find the spring fast comes just before the days when the housewives are turning the houses upside down in their semi-annual attacks upon the dust and the moths. It is the time which we husbands dread, but it is the housecleaning time, which every prudent wife deems essential for the physical health of her family. It is absolutely necessary to keep physical dirt out of a house, yet in spite of all precautions it will keep creeping in everywhere. Although the workmen in the Philadelphia mint are as careful as they can be, the dirt and the fine particles of gold will sift through the floor cracks. So great are these siftings that every year the floor is taken up and the dirt is separated from the gold, and thousands of dollars' worth of gold are thus collected for the United States treasury. In spite of all our precautions the minute, innumerable stains of sin will creep into the house, therefore each year it is very desirable to obey the call to the Lenten spring fast.

Once a year is certainly not too often to take a spiritual accounting and to conduct a serious self examination. The call to a fast should reach the ear of every Christian. What does that mean? Shall our wives and our sisters go to the grocer and the butcher and the baker and say, "We do not want any more meat or vegetables or bread for the next forty days?" Does it mean that all the members of a home shall go without physical nutrition, as Dr. Tanner fasted for forty days and Leonard Thress fasted for fifty days and Rev. C. H. Dalrymple fasted for thirty-nine days and Milton Rathburn fasted for thirty-six days and Estella F. Kuenzel fasted for forty-one days? Oh, no. The habit of fasting, inspired by boastful folly and the desire of seeing how long we can live without tasting food, is just as sinful as the opposite extreme of gluttony, to see how much one can eat without utterly destroying the smooth workings of the digestive organs.

Spiritual housecleaning does not mean the complete abstinence from physical food. It does mean emphatically the reconsecration and the rededication of the domestic fireside to Jesus Christ through self abnegation. It means that we shall have prayer at the cradle. It means that we shall have prayers in the bedroom and prayers in the parlor and prayers in the sitting room and prayers in the kitchen and have the dining room spread with a gospel banquet of the "bread of life."

The Lenten season in the home means simply the spiritual preparation for Christ to visit the home. When Martin Farquhar Tupper, the famous English poet, came to visit in Brooklyn we gave to him the very best room in the house. We gathered together the most famous literary men of the city to meet him. At that party Horace Greeley came, and William Cullen Bryant came and read his "Thanatopsis," and George William Curtis came, and I think John G. Whittier came. We well remember the mother giving to Tupper's popular book "Proverbial Philosophy," and saying: "Read that book. You should know who Martin Farquhar Tupper is before he comes, and then you can honor him as he should be honored." In like manner the Lenten season in the home is an appropriate time for the spiritual preparation for Christ's coming to the home. The children should be told all about him and be prepared to welcome the Saviour as a friend. The cook and the chambermaid should be told all about him, so that they may know how Christ loved Martha, the busy cook, as well as the gentle Mary who sat at his feet.

Home friends should be told all about him, so that they also may come in and honor the divine guest. We should prepare to greet Christ not as a stranger, but as a long loved and anxiously awaited friend. The Lenten season is an annual plea for the spiritualization of the church. Ministers of the different Protestant Churches are more and more getting into the custom of closing in a "retreat" at least once a year, where by fasting and prayer they may spiritually prepare themselves for their ecclesiastical ministrations. At least once a year as church members we should go into a spiritual "retreat." In that "retreat" we should call upon our Heavenly Father that the Holy Spirit may bless us in our relationship with our mid-week prayer meetings and Sunday schools and Christian Endeavor Societies and bless us in our relationship to his great church at large.

After Jesus Christ drove the money changers out of the temple, were the attempts to secularize the house of God into a place for mere educational and literary and musical and social and financial enjoyment forever abandoned? Do not some of us, consciously and unconsciously, fall into the error of coming to church merely on account of the oratorical gifts of the preacher? Did not thousands upon thousands of worshippers sit at the feet of a Dececher, a Cuming, a Rowland Hill and a John Wesley, not because they were worshipping God, but rather because they were

We know that the finest living musical composer of Italy leads the Vatican choir and the finest organist of all London is master of St. Paul's famous organ and that Plymouth church was not more noted for the fact that it had one of the greatest of musicians, who was able to make its organ pipes weep and sob as well as sound a mighty hosanna. Are not some of our churches on account of their wealth being more and more secularized into mere social clubs? Do not many professional men go to church not for the spiritual good they may get out of those churches, but that they may be able to come in touch with those who worship in those congregations? Is it not becoming more and more the custom for the members of the church boards of trustees to judge of the success or the failure of the church by the criterion of money—by the way that church in its collections is able to take in as well as give out wealth?

Oh, yes, my friends, the church members should heed the Lenten summons. They should heed the spiritual call, which soars above the discordant ones of the busy marts even as the clear note of the thrush may be heard above the bedlam of the woods sounding the reveille of the morning. They should heed the Lenten call which says to the clergyman, "Oh, ordained undershepherd of the Christian pulpit, down on your knees and pray!" Lent calls to the elders and deacons and Sunday school officers, "Down on your knees and pray!" It calls to the lay members, whether bediamonded and in silks or in humble homespun, "Down on your knees and pray!" Oh, that we might all heed the spiritual Lenten call and make Christ's church a veritable "house of prayer."

Thus, my friends, the spring fast calls to the men in the social world and to the men in the business world and to the men in the home and to the men in the church to come to prayer. It calls at this time because on the coming Ash Wednesday we shall celebrate the beginning of one of the most triumphant and yet saddest times of all Christ's earthly existence. The Jordanic baptism was just over. Christ was about to begin his divine mission. We know not how far the human nature he assumed may have obscured for the time the divine attributes he possessed. It may be that in those forty days of solitary thought and prayer he realized more clearly than in his former years the sublimity of his work and of his sacrifice. He saw what his work was to be. He saw how he must carry the burden of man's sins and die for man and be resurrected before he could return to his Father's throne.

May this coming spring fast of the Lenten season be to you also a time of spiritual awakening. May it be a time when you will not only realize that God has a glorious earthly work for you to do, but a time when you can realize that after work is done you shall live on and on and with Christ and never die. May you during the next coming forty days be much in prayer, much in earnest beseechment. May you also feel and know that the way you are to be best fitted for that earthly work is by the depth of your repentance as well as by the height of your glorious and triumphant faith.

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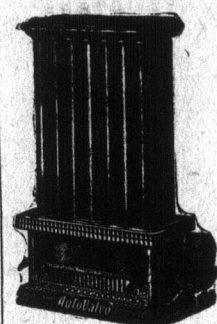
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